

Crosby Column

No Protest

By John Crosby

WASHINGTON.

At 10:45 a. m. E. S. T. on April 25 a B-52 dropped a hydrogen bomb which lit up a large area near Christmas Island in the Pacific. On the floor of Congress that day, the next, or yet, there has not been a single audible word of protest about the resumption of testing.

Now, whatever you think about the resumption of testing, it is certainly a debatable subject. It has been debated around the world without cease among scientists and plain people of all stripes of intelligence for five years. There is a great deal to be said on both sides. But how can anyone defend Congressional silence on what is, after all, a subject of towering importance not only to our generation but to future generations?

The word debate is not easy to define and that makes it hard to pinpoint when the last serious debate occurred on the Senate floor. Some Congressional observers feel the last real debate on foreign policy was over NATO, the so-called troops-to-Europe issue in 1949. The last debate anyone remembers where oratory actually changed votes was over the censure of Sen. Joseph McCarthy and that was eight years ago.

There's nothing resembling organized doctrinaire opposition from the Republican party. The doctrinaire minority leaders like Senators Taft and Knowland have been replaced by Senator Dirksen, who has no apparent fixed position on anything. In fact, when one sees Dirksen embraced by President Kennedy at National Airport on television one finds it hard to believe Dirksen is supposed to be an opposition leader. Even thoughtful Democrats in Congress will tell you (privately, of course) that it's bad for the country that we don't have an opposition leader of the vigor and principle of Senator Taft.

Everyone, Republican and Democrat alike, wants to be popular at the White House these days. In fact, it is not putting it too strongly to say that everyone, Republican and Democrat alike, is downright scared to be unpopular at the White House where wrath is swift and terrible.

John J. Lindsay, New York Republican,

one of the few who dares speak up strongly, says: "I blame the Kennedy family for much of it. It's gotten so that if you're against the Kennedy family, you're against progress. You can't discuss these things. The party line in the House of Representatives is that anyone who proposes a different or deeper or better approach to, say, the Kennedy civil rights program, then he's against civilization. I don't think the Kennedys realize how much they're shutting off debate."

But, of course, it's unfair to blame the absence of debate on Capitol Hill on the Kennedys altogether. The gradual disappearance of dissent from American life preceded the Kennedys by many years and it's been going on in many fields and areas for many reasons. One of them is the increasing complexity of life and issues and this has seriously limited debate in Congress.

Sen. Eugene McCarthy, a formidable speaker himself, deplores the absence of debate but he points out that some of the great opposition figures in Congress, like the elder Senator LaFollette and Senator Borah, were debating relatively simple issues. But the issues are no longer simple.

"Atomic energy is a new force in American life," Senator McCarthy points out. "You find the Administration saying: 'If you knew what we know, you wouldn't hold the point of view you do.' How can you argue against that?" Many of the great issues confronting Congress are wrapped in official secrecy so that Congressmen can hardly argue against them, or they are so complicated that no one but scientists can understand them. Or both.

As far as nuclear testing goes, not only was there no Congressional debate but increasingly there is no forum, no platform, from which the citizen can protest. Last week, for example, the ladies of Women's Strike for Peace were wandering around Washington in search of someone to protest to. They claim that there have not even been any Congressional hearings on nuclear testing in three years, the last of those being held in front of the Health and Welfare Committee of the House in 1959.

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